

# The Story of Berrybrook Farmhouse

By DONNA CLIFFORD

There are few vistas in Duxbury as unchanged through the centuries as the view from Winter St. into the broad, sloping fields that make up the Lucretia Prentiss Bailey Trust lands, popularly known as the Berrybrook School and grounds. A glance into this idyllic setting is a glance into Duxbury's rich Colonial history.

## COMMENTARY

Earlier this year the Berrybrook School Board of Directors voted to preserve and maintain the Berrybrook Farmhouse, given its centuries of service as a dwelling and, more recently, a school. This is a fitting tribute to one of Duxbury's oldest homes. They contracted Duxbury resident Bob Dente, to research the history of the farm house. Based on Mr. Dente's recommendation, the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society has issued a date board for the farmhouse – Blanie Phillips c. 1733.

The Berrybrook Farmhouse sits on approximately 60 acres of meadows and woodlands, which were part of Lot 151, one of more than 170 Duxbury and Pembroke lots that were doled out via lottery on Dec. 11, 1713. Records show that Samuel Pierce and John Sanders drew half-shares in Lot 151, giving them dual ownership. The land changed hands several times before it was purchased by Thomas Phillips and his son, Thomas Jr., in 1731 for 55 pounds, equal to 1,100 shillings. In those days, a bushel of wheat cost about 9 shillings. Needless to say, Duxbury land values have skyrocketed in proportion to income and economic factors.

Thomas Phillips Sr. sold his share of the land to another son, Blanie Phillips, in 1734. It is with Blanie Phillips that the history of the Berrybrook Farmhouse really begins. To the best that we can tell, construction of the house probably began in 1733.

1733, the year before his father sold him the land. In Colonial days it wasn't unusual for a father to allow his sons to build on family land. Records show that Blanie, a Duxbury constable, got married in 1733, so it seems logical that he wanted a home for himself and his wife-to-be, Christiana Wadsworth.

The sound of children filled the little farmhouse from its earliest days. Blanie and Christiana had 11



children, nine of whom survived into adulthood. They lived in the farmhouse until around 1765, when they moved to Hanson, then part of Pembroke. Blanie died in Hanson in 1800 at age 78. Christiana died around the same time, at age 80.

When Blanie and Christiana moved to Hanson, they sold the farmhouse and its surrounding 80 acres to their son, Blanie Jr., for about 133 pounds. Blanie Jr. and his wife, Mary, had six children. One of the children, Eunice, died when she was 15 months old. Interestingly, the couple named their next daughter Eunice as well. Perhaps this was done out of love and remembrance of the first Eunice? We can only guess.

Blanie Jr. eventually moved to Pembroke and died at age 88 in 1824. Mary died much younger, at age 35 in 1773.

mid-1950s, when Katherine B. Mann converted it into the Berrybrook School. The changes necessary for the building to function as a school altered much of the old home's visual antiquity, but a close look reveals some of its ancient features. The center chimney is still intact, as is the fieldstone foundation, a prominent feature of 18th-century New England homes. Perhaps the most intriguing feature is the long, domed tunnel-like egress from the cellar. The egress, constructed of granite, stone and brick, was likely added sometime in the 1800s, since granite and brick were generally not used in Colonial Duxbury homes until after 1800. The tunnel has recesses on each side wall, in the shape of shelves, though their exact use is perhaps lost to the ages.

The beautiful upland Berrybrook grounds have provided an array of uses throughout the centuries. The area was probably cleared, plowed and planted soon after the original sale in 1713. Following the tradition of farmable New England land, the Berrybrook site has likely served as grazing grounds for cows, sheep, horses and other farm animals, and as planting ground for hay, rye, corn and other crops for the landowners. More recently, birdwatchers, dog walkers, cross country skiers and other outdoor enthusiasts have found the fields and the Trust to be quite accommodating. Plus, there aren't many spots left on the South Shore where passersby can see fresh hay bales dotting a newly-mowed field. The hay helps feed the cows at the nearby O'Neil farm.

Katherine Bailey Mann, who founded Berrybrook School in 1954, envisioned an educational setting rich in natural and historical significance. In old Lot 151, settled by Blanie Phillips so many years ago, her vision became reality.

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